

Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee
**“National Defense Priorities from Members for the
FY2013 National Defense Authorization Act”**

Rep. Randy Neugebauer
April 17, 2012

Chairman McKeon and Ranking Member Smith, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today regarding our national defense priorities.

My district is home to Dyess Air Force Base in Abilene, Texas. For the last nine years it has been my honor to represent the men and women of this base and its two principle missions, the 7th Bomb Wing and the 317th Airlift Group, as well as its guard and reserve units. Between these missions, our service members at Dyess have been playing an invaluable and daily role in the fight against terror.

In fact, earlier this year, the 317th Airlift Group marked 3,000 days of continuous deployment – a streak dating back to December of 2003. In that time, more than 7,000 members of this unit have been put in harm’s way. As you all know, the air mobility mission is one of the most important missions in the modern military. Operations that used to take weeks or months now take days or hours. The 317th has often been labeled the “busiest C-130 group” in the Air Force, and this current deployment streak is another honored mark in the long history of Dyess Airlifters.^[1]

Also earlier this year, the B-1 bomber flew its 10,000th combat mission. That’s not bad for a plane that was originally designed to be a Cold War-era nuclear bomber. Since first entering service in 1985, modifications to the B-1 and the addition of precision guided munitions have turned it into the workhorse of the bomber fleet. In Afghanistan for example, the B-1 has seen daily use and dropped 70 percent of the precision guided munitions.^[2] In fact, it may surprise many members to know that at 75,000 pounds, the B-1 actually can carry the largest payload of any of our bombers – even more than the B-52 Stratofortress.^{[3][4]}

^[1] Viss, Carol. “[317th AG Out-flies Every Other AMC C-130 Unit](#).” *Dyess Air Force Base*. 13 Jan. 2006. 7th Bomb Wing Public Affairs. 13 April 2012.

^[2] “[B-1B Lancer: Overview](#).” *The Boeing Company*. 13 April 2012.

^[3] “[Fact Sheet: B-1B Lancer](#).” *U.S. Air Force*. 23 Dec. 2009. Air Combat Command, Public Affairs Office. 13 April 2012.

^[4] “[Fact Sheet: B-52 Stratofortress](#).” *U.S. Air Force*. 29 Dec. 2011. Air Combat Command, Public Affairs Office. 13 April 2012.

But the B-1 is not just about large payloads. To quote General Petraeus, the B-1 also *“has very good ISR capabilities... [It] can loiter for a good time when it’s not being used to drop bombs... [It] is almost like having another unmanned aerial vehicle in terms of full motion video and so forth... So, it’s not just a case of a very, very capable bomber just boring holes in the sky, waiting to open the bomb-bay doors.”*^[5] Mr. Chairman, the B-1 is not all brawn and no brains. It can simultaneously deliver both firepower and intelligence support to our troops, and can stay in the area to sustain these efforts for significant periods of time. Under the President’s new Defense Strategic Guidance, these attributes are even more important for future conflicts. The tyranny of distance and the uncertainty of allied support changes the long range bomber’s role from an *“important”* capability to a *“critical”* capability for our nation's defense.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, last year the President’s budget called for the retirement of six B-1’s. I am here today to thank the Committee for the work you and your staff did last year on this issue. While I feel strongly that keeping the fleet at its current size of 66 is important to our changing national security priorities, by spacing out the six-retirements over five years, we can carefully study and assess the impact these retirements are having on the ground. After all, the Air Force only has 162 bombers – and more than half are over 50 years old. With a new bomber still 10-15 years away, we cannot proceed cautiously enough when making decisions regarding this extremely valuable and limited resource.

Dyess Air Force Base is home to the largest B-1 unit in the world, and as the B-1’s role continues to evolve and prove its worth to our military on a daily basis, I again thank the Committee for the thoughtful approach it has taken regarding the B-1. In closing I would urge the Committee to continue follow the issue closely and ensure that the spirit and letter of its efforts from last year are followed. I would also urge the Committee to support the current B-1 sustainability and improvement efforts in this year’s budget.

Thank you again for inviting me to testify here before you today. I believe this process provides members an invaluable opportunity, and I appreciate the Committee’s time and consideration.

^[5] U.S. Congress. [“Nomination of General David H. Petraeus, USA, for Reappointment to the Grade of General, and to be Commander, International Security Assistance Force, and Commander, United States Forces Afghanistan.”](#) 29 June 2010. Senate Armed Services Committee. 13 April 2012.